

Scappoose Rural Fire District and Columbia River Fire & Rescue
51511 SE 2nd St., Scappoose, OR
Special Meeting/Workshop of the Board of Directors
February 23, 2020 4:00 pm

Joint Special Meeting Call to Order: After due and legal notice the Special Joint Board Meeting/Workshop of the Columbia River Fire & Rescue and Scappoose Rural Fire District Board of Directors was called to order at 4:04 pm by Board President Hans Feige.

Present: David Graham, David Sorenson, Ron Cairns, Andy Kriek, Kim McLane, Mark Kreutzer, Gary Hudson, Kelly Niles, Hans Feige.

Absent: David Grant

Others: Chief Hoke, DC Pricher, DC Smythe, DC Marks, DC Holsey, FF DuBois, FF Booth, Lt. Anderson, FF Kriek, Paramedic Quinn, FF Ahlers, FD Salisbury, Maria Heath

Opening Comments: Following the flag salute, President Graham thanked members for their attendance at the special session. President Feige requested that each board member be exhaustive in their search for answers in developing the Fire Authority (FA).

Develop a Vision for the Districts: DC Pricher, acting as facilitator, requested that board members refer to the Task, Purpose, and End State model throughout the meeting to guide their discussions.

Task: What do you want us to do?

Purpose: Why are we doing it?

End State: What it should look like in the end.

DC Pricher asked members what they wanted the vision of the Fire Authority to look like.

VP Cairns added that he wants the FA to maintain professionalism. VP Niles stated the need to provide better service. Director Kreutzer questioned the word "better". Niles clarified the statement by referencing the low staffing levels within the districts and his desire to improve staffing in order to provide better service. After discussion, the word "better" was modified to "improved". Directors agreed to the statement: Provide improved service to the Fire Districts.

Secretary Hudson stated the FA needs to have a clear organization with clear lines of authority.

VP Niles added the need for accountability.

Director McLane stated that the whole reason for the FA is to give our community the best service. To this, DC Pricher suggested editing this statement to: Improved Resource Management. McLane agreed with this modification.

Director Kriek stated that the FA must maintain fiscal responsibility.

VP Niles added later in the meeting the need for the FA to maintain/improve internal and external communications.

Review the FA Concept in Detail: Chief Hoke reviewed and further explained the concept of the FA to board members. He stated that the FA is not a merger. A merger would require a vote. The FA is essentially an IGA of a different name. Chief Hoke described how Lane County began their FA journey. He stated that apparatus and buildings would continue to belong to their respective districts. The taxpayers own those items. Personnel and operating expenses are moved under the FA umbrella, and capital budgets stay with their districts. All employees will belong to the FA.

VP Cairns asked if each district would approach voters separately for new monies or if that would happen as an FA. Hoke responded that each district would approach voters separately.

President Feige asked how the amount of money each district budgets toward the FA would be calculated, given the different labor contracts, numbers of employees, etc. Chief Hoke replied that staffing levels would not change in the FA. Employees can be moved from district to district, but the total numbers wouldn't change.

VP Niles asked if forming an FA budget was still possible given two separate union contracts. Chief Hoke replied that it is possible through the budgeting process. VP Niles asked how service would be improved if they continued operating with two separate contracts. Chief Hoke responded that the unions would need to work to resolve this issue. They would need to come together under one contract or develop a third contract specifically for the FA.

DC Pricher added that by July 2020, the people currently under the IGA would be the only people budgeted under an FA. This would include budgeting, administration, and Chief Officers. This would need to be part of the message to voters and how this improves service to taxpayers.

Chief Hoke then said the accounting would move to accrual rather than modified cash basis.

Chief Hoke used the purchasing of uniforms as an example of FA unification, saying that uniforms would be purchased from the same vendor and we would pay the same rates for uniform items across districts.

Director Kreutzer asked if each district would continue to have separate budget meetings. He also asked if there would be a separate budget committee for the FA. Chief Hoke responded that each district would continue to have separate budget committees. The FA would also have a budget committee. Citizens serving on district budget committees may also serve on the FA budget committee.

Director McLane asked which budget the money generated from Fire Marshal fees falls under. Chief Hoke stated that when under the full FA (2021), the Fire Marshal fees would go to the FA budget. VP Niles mentioned that until 2021, the Fire Marshal fees from locations in CRFR district go to SRFD's budget. This makes it difficult for him to sell to constituents. DC Pricher noted that the inspector will not be generating revenue under Fire Life Safety inspections. He acknowledged that driveway inspection fees are currently going to SRFD's budget. Niles expressed concern about CRFR subsidizing SRFD in this way. President Graham noted that SRFD pays the Fire Marshal's salary, so SRFD incurs costs associated with inspections.

Chief Hoke stated that all revenue is budgeted and then would eventually be transferred to the FA.

Secretary Sorenson stated that the budgets would be reviewed line-by-line and members would determine what line items are moved to the FA in 2020 and 2021.

Chief Hoke commented that the only line item determined by percentage in a FA budget would likely be the maintenance shop, since CRFR has 70% of the equipment, while SRFD has 30%. He mentioned that the hardest part of developing the FA will be getting the budget right. He also stated that he, FDs Salisbury and Nelson would likely go to Lane County for a day to study their budget development process.

Members asked questions to clarify their understanding of what budget items would be part of the FA. Chief Hoke said an example of a line item for the FA might be maintaining the garage doors at SRFD.

VP Niles stated his need to know what the FA would look like to voters. He expressed that he leans toward a full merger rather than continually going to the voters and asking for more money. Members then discussed the differences between a levy, a bond, and respective tax rates. Secretary Hudson asked what difference it would make with respect to taxes and levies, stating that the needs of the districts will never go away. Citing increased personnel and call volumes, the directors will continue to be faced with the question of whether to ask voters for more funding.

Chief Hoke stated the need to sell the concept of an FA to voters while taking advantage of timing at local, state and federal levels. Presidential election years provide us with the opportunity to have more voter turn-out. State issues of Cap and Trade, if passed, will increase fuel costs. Compression on tax abatements also affect our ability to stay within budget.

DC Pricher asked for additional thoughts about a vision statement for the FA. Chief Hoke read a portion of the Lexipol vision statement. Chief Hoke related his discovery that career staff and volunteers need to be asked for input regarding an FA, suggesting the development of a short survey to give all stakeholders an option to share thoughts. President Feige disagreed with this idea, stating his belief that this is not the correct time for a survey. He thought it would be more beneficial at the end of the process. He expressed his desire for putting an operational plan in place now, rather than a conceptual plan.

Chief Hoke distributed Organizational Chart #3, and asked members to review and ask questions. Director Kriek asked if six Battalion Chiefs was the correct number. VP Niles responded, saying it was accurate. Director McLane asked if the Medical Services Officer was the newly approved Compliance Officer. DC Pricher affirmed. President Feige asked who would pay for the new Battalion Chief positions. Chief Hoke responded by saying that funds would be moved from other positions. For example, the budgeted funds for the Recruitment and Retention position are available since that position is now funded under a grant. He also stated that one Battalion Chief position would be funded through SRFD, and two BC positions would be funded through CRFR. President Feige then reminded Chief Hoke that this is the first time he'd heard of this method to fund the Battalion Chief positions and again expressed his desire to move from a conceptual plan to an operational plan. VP Niles expressed skepticism in shuttling funds to pay for the BC positions. Concerns about sustained budgeting and long-term adjustments continued. Chief Hoke stated that Battalion Chiefs would be hired in April, and recruitment is taking place currently for the Medical Services Officer position. When asked which Division Chiefs would be moved to Battalion Chiefs, Chief Hoke replied DC Halsey, DC Marks, and DC O'Connor.

Discuss steps ahead for the FA: Chief Hoke distributed the Two-Year FA Road Map to members and stated that Ken Jones, an attorney, would help in the development of the FA.

President Feige asked how many of the bulleted items on the road map had been completed. Chief Hoke replied that the planning committee had met, they are currently looking at the budget, the Boards have approved the FA, and the PIO has been consulted regarding a public relations campaign. Chief Hoke then asked the members what they wanted to call the FA. He also stated that an email would go out to employees asking the same question.

President Graham asked for details regarding a public relations campaign. Chief Hoke acknowledged that adjustments for personnel could be huge. He again expressed the need to align pay and benefits among employees. VP Niles requested improved communication on the Two-Year Road Map and the plan for achieving each item. This led to the addition of the last recommendation for a vision statement: Improved internal and external communication. VP Niles also requested better self-assessment strategies to include accomplishments and failures of the FA.

President Feige suggested distributing the Two-Year Plan in increments to staff, while keeping the board informed of progress.

Secretary Sorenson asked if the recommendations from the Matrix report are incorporated in the Two-Year Road Map. Chief Hoke responded that some of the items in the Matrix report are FA related, while others are not.

President Feige inquired who would lead the coalition between career and volunteer groups. Chief Hoke responded that Association Presidents would be members of this coalition, as well as Chief Greenup.

Secretary Sorenson asked if it was possible to unite the billing systems, since SRFD outsources billing and CRFR uses in-house billing and contracts with Clatskanie Fire. Chief Hoke responded with the need to research cost effectiveness and choose one billing system.

Chief Hoke stated the need to name the FA Planning Committee, made of two members from each board as well as Chief Hoke. This committee is responsible for making sure the timeline is accomplished. VP Cairns expects the FA planning committee to update all board members.

President Feige suggested continuation of the workshop format to keep all board members informed. VP Niles agreed that the workshop format was beneficial.

Discuss Process Improvement on Board Communications: The Boards agreed to continuation of the workshop format, the schedule of which to be determined. Members agreed that email chains and small group social get-togethers across districts will continue the development of positive working relationships as the FA progresses toward a common goal. Chief Hoke pointed out that there are already many meetings. In fairness to staff, some meeting should be eliminated if more are added.

DC Pricher suggested assigning items on the Two-Year Road Map to individuals to report back to the board with FA related progress. He asked if board members wanted to develop a vision statement based upon the meeting notes, or if they preferred, he would write the vision statement. President Feige asked that DC Pricher, Chief Hoke, and the FA Planning Committee prepare the vision statement. VP Niles expressed the need to develop a mission statement, vision statement, and SMART goals.

Closing Comments: President Feige stated that good progress was made during the workshop. President Graham agreed that the workshop gave members a better idea of progress and plans moving toward an FA. He also thanked everyone for their participation. Chief Hoke thanked DC Pricher for facilitating.

Meeting adjourned at 6:59 pm.